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ASIA PACIFIC COALITION ON EAST TIMOR
PRESS RELEASE

The Asia Pacific Coalition on East Timor (APCET) initiated an all-Asian Women's Solidarity visit to the refugee camps in West Timor with the objective of learning first hand the current situation of the women and children in the refugee camps in order to assess their immediate and most urgent needs, identify possible solutions and to report on appropriate ways to address the situation.

The all-Asian Women's Solidarity visit to West Timor took place between the 23 - 26 July. In all seven camps were visited in and around Kupang and Atambua where meetings and discussions were held with the women in the camps about their concerns. Meetings were also held with local NGO's and Indonesian officials as part of the information gathering task.

The teams findings (which include the appalling conditions of many of the camps, the lack of housing, sanitation and water, adequate food sources, access to education and health services, income-generating activities and the high levels of violence against women inside the camps), are being presented to this press conference. The aim is to refocus the international community and the media's attention on the continuing plight of the refugees and the facilitation of their safe return to East Timor.

APCET ALL WOMEN SOLIDARITY VISIT TO THE WEST TIMOR REFUGEE CAMPS MISSION STATEMENT

The Asia-Pacific Coalition for East Timor (APCET) is a coalition supporting the independence of East Timor. It was formed after the First Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor (APCET I) in Manila in 1994. APCET has 17 affiliates in 10 countries.

In the period prior to the August 30 referendum for autonomy or independence in July 1999, APCET organized the first All-Women Solidarity Visit to East Timor. The mission looked into the condition of East Timorese women and children and their special needs while under Indonesian rule. The team documented cases of human rights abuses against women, many of them gender-related.

APCET organized a second All Women Solidarity Visit to the Refugee Camps from 22-26 July 2001 with the following stated objectives:

1. To refocus world attention to the continuing suffering as refugees in West Timor and get international support for their safe return;
2. To lobby the Indonesian government, the UN and other international bodies for the earliest return of the refugees;
3. To lend support and express international concern to the refugees;
4. To assess and report on the current situation of the refugees in the camps;
5. To learn first-hand the needs and conditions of women in the refugee camps and identify appropriate mechanisms to address their needs.
6. To rekindle international media interest in the refugee crisis;
7. To facilitate organizational links between the All-Women team and the East Timorese and Indonesian organizations both in East Timor and in West Timor.

The team was composed of :

COUNTRY	PARTICIPANT	ORGANIZATION
1. AUSTRALIA		
	Jill Hickson	Member, Australia in Solidarity with Indonesia and East Timor (ASIET)
2. EAST TIMOR	Manuela Pereira	Executive Coordinator, Fokupers
3. MALAYSIA	Irene Fernandez	Chair, Pesticide Action Network-Asia Pacific Director, Tenaganita
4. PHILIPPINES		

	Eleanor Conda	Executive Director, Asian Center for Women's Rights
5.	Jessica Soto	Executive Director, Amnesty International-Pilipinas
6. INDONESIA	Mindo Radjagukguk	Training Division Staff, SOLIDAMOR

The team converged in Denpasar, Indonesia. It then went to Kupang, the capital of West Timor, and next to Atambua, the capital of the Belu district, some 30 kilometers from the border. The team crossed the West Timor- East Timor border on the 26th July.

Actual Meetings

In Kupang, the team met with the Centre for Internally Displaced People's Services (CIS GAMKI-GMKI) , which in conjunction with international agencies, provides humanitarian services, investigates human rights abuses, counsels women victims of violence, and disseminates accurate information to refugees on repatriation to combat militia intimidation. CIS is an NGO formed in 1999 shortly after the arrival of east Timorese refugees in West Timor and acted as the West Timor partner of the APCET team in accessing the camps.

The team also met with Major Rudolf Roja, Commander of the Mobile Brigade in Kupang; and with Lieutenant Colonel Aritonang, Commander of the DANDIM in Kupang.

In Atambua, the team met with local NGOs with program for the refugees. This included the Yayasan Peduli Indonesia (YPI); Forum Peduli Perempuan; Forum for Disaster Preparedness and Response (FKPB);

Some of these groups are members of the Forum of NGOs for Humanitarian Issues in West Timor.

The Camps

The team visited a total of seven camps in West Timor, 2 in Kupang and five in Atambua. In Kupang, the team visited Noelbaki and Tuapukan; and in Atambua, the camps in Naibonat, Haliwen, Lolowa, Tirta and Lebur.

Noelbaki is located some 15 kilometers from Kupang and has estimated pupulation of 5,000 refugees. Tupaukan is some 21 kilometers in the eastern outskirt of Kupang with an estimated 13,000 refugees.

The camp in Haliwen inside the stadium has an estimated 4,000 refugees; Lolowa has 3,000 refugees; Tirta from 2,000 to 3,000; and Lebur A with an estimated 2,400.

The camps also have distinct populations. Noelbaki refugees are mostly from Viqueque; Haliwen from Ermera; Lolowa from Dili; Tirta from Manatuto; and Lebur A from Aileu.

The Context

West Timor is under the jurisdiction of the UDAYANA (the regional Indonesian army command) overseeing security in West Timor and Bali.

Kupang and Atambua have offices of the SATGAS PMP, the Indonesian East Timor Refugees Task Force.

Following the killing of three UNHCR foreign workers in Atambua in September last year, the UNHCR and other foreign organizations assisting the refugees have pulled out from West Timor.

Because of the attack on the UNHCR, Atambua has been under "high-level alert". Police have reportedly been instructed to "accompany" or "escort' foreign guests to the refugee camps. The team had four police escorts in Atambua while visiting the camps up to the trip to the border The four were from the intelligence section of the regional police department. All were ex-policemen in East Timor who supposedly knew the refugees in the camps.

The police reported of an incident in Tini, Atambua where 5 houses were reportedly damaged in a fight between young refugee groups and local people. They said the locals were planning a protest march in downtown Atambua and therefore guests needed "security". The reported incident occurred a day before the team arrived in Atambua.

FINDINGS OF THE MISSION

The Social Conditions

Housing - The majority of the camps visited were without adequate housing with dirt and uneven floors, the use of tarps and other inadequate materials, no cooking facilities, a lack of privacy and adequate space and so on.

Food - Women complained about the lack of food available for their families and the inadequate and unequal distribution of food given by the Indonesian government to the different camps. Distribution in camps were controlled by the camp coordinators. The low level of nutrition in the camps was clear from the appearance of the women and children.

Health - Women explained that they and their children had many serious health problems, but there were no doctors in the camps and they could not afford to pay to see a doctor outside the camp or pay for the medicines. Many of the traditional midwives had repatriated back to East Timor leaving the women without assistance during childbirth, nor money to access local hospitals. One camp reported the deaths of 10 women from childbirth complications in just one month; in another camp, five women had died in one month.

Education - Due to resentment of the local West Timorese to the refugees using land they previously had access to, refugee children were not attending local schools. Where the Indonesian government had provided schools near the camps, women stated that because it was compulsory for the children to wear a uniform costing R25,000. According to some women, they had to pay R10,000 per month for a child. These prevented children from attending school.

Money - The Indonesian government provides R1,500 per day per person. This amount is given to the camp coordinators who distribute it to the heads of the families, which in most cases are the men. This was an example of gender discrimination in the camps. The women complained that they do not receive this money, and is used for the activities of the men, such as drinking and gambling.

Lack of Activity - Women expressed their frustration with the situation where they had nothing to do all day, every day. Those with agricultural skills had no land to cultivate. Those with handicraft and weaving skills had no materials to work with. The women all expressed the desire to be active, to have skills trainings and access to materials which would allow them to generate an income to help overcome some of the problems they face.

Sanitation and Water - Except for the camp that housed the families of the East Timorese TNI, all the camps have inadequate toilet and sanitation facilities. The women expressed their concerns about the health risks this was creating.

Clothes - Women complained that the clothing available to them was inadequate. Lack of underwear and decent clothing for the children was seen as a major problem.

Children - A real concern for a number of women was the lack of information about their missing children, left in East Timor or lost along the way, and their whereabouts were not known. The other concerns were the health problems from preventable diseases, lack of education, the trauma many of them experienced in the past as well as from living in the camps. Women were concerned about the future of their children.

Violence - Violence that occurs in many forms both inside and outside the camps have impacted on the lives of the women and children. Outside the camps there is conflict with the local West Timorese communities and the refugees. Often the water supply outside the camp and accessed by both communities was a source of tension. Also, there was resentment by local communities over lack of access to land previously theirs to use.

Tensions and conflict in the camp often resulted in violence among the men and between different camps.

The incidence of violence against women, including both domestic violence and sexual violence were rife in the camps. Sexual violence included rape, forced marriages, the high incidence of adultery and the taking by husbands of many wives (up to 11 in some cases reported), the making and distribution of pornography, the rape of young women through rape, forced marriages from the age of 15, and the incidence and spread of sexual health problems. Prostitution of women, primarily was also mentioned.

WHERE DOES THE VIOLENCE COME FROM AND WHAT IS THE RESULT

The violence is perpetrated by the men. The Indonesian government organisation, SATGAS, which carried out the registration process talked to us of the militia still operating in the camps as did some of the women in the camps. Some women referred to them as the 'elites' running the camps controlling the distribution of food, materials and money and it is most certainly carried out by the heads of families. Also with the high incidence of adultery, many women suffered abuse by men who were not their husbands as well.

The result from this situation creates a climate of fear inside the camps experienced by the women. This is not a recent development as a result of living in refugee camps although this exacerbates the situation and causes a great deal of stress on the women and children. For many of the women it is continuing the reality which they experienced over the past two decades living in East Timor under Indonesian military occupation.

This level of violence creates an atmosphere of intimidation and fear and thus, limiting any capacity of women in independent decision-making. For example, the recent registration process carried out by the Indonesian government in June cannot be treated as a true indicator of the desires of the refugees. For instance, it was reported even by the

Indonesian government officials that people who voted to remain in Indonesia, turned up at their office two days later asking to be repatriated to East Timor.

The structure inside the camps where the men are in control of the distribution of materials leads to discrimination in the distribution of food and money.

This climate of fear, intimidation and violence must be addressed to gain the true picture of the desires of the refugees in West Timor and to arrive at a solution to this complex situation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognizing the inhumane conditions, the extreme suffering, little or no access to basic needs like food, shelter, clothing, health care services, the growing violence against women, the lack of education for children, and as a result the bleak future for women, the youth and children, who form the majority of the refugees and realizing that the majority of them want to return to East Timor, it is imperative that an effective response is created to respect fundamental rights and the dignity of the women and children in the camps in West Timor.

The APCET Women's Mission, therefore brings forward the following recommendations that:

1. The UN Agencies, International Institutions, the Indonesian government, International NGOs, together with the local organizations and religious groups, must immediately intervene on humanitarian grounds to meet the basic needs of the women and children in terms of better food, greater access, shelter, health, clothing and education of the children.
2. The Indonesian government and UNTAET must ensure freer and greater access of NGOs especially local organizations and religious groups into the camps to work directly with the women and children. This freer access will help to initiate various programs of education and training for skills development, for organizing income generating projects, counseling and various other interventions for women's empowerment.
3. The conditions in the camps as well as the climate of fear as a result of the continued violence against women makes women increasing vulnerable to infections including STIs and HIV/AIDS. Women's reproductive rights are further not recognized and are repeatedly violated as a result of how the camp is organized. Therefore, there is a need for programs to reduce the vulnerability of women and the threat to their reproductive health. These programs can be realized only through an integrated approach with women's organizations taking the lead.
4. Women's capacity to make decisions has been strangled by patriachal, social and family relations and by lack of information, misinformation or no direct access by the women to information. Mechanisms need to be created to ensure correct and honest information reaches the women in the camps. This can be developed by various organizations in West Timor with an effective partnership with women's organizations, relevant agencies and institutions in East Timor.
5. There are now excellent initiatives for women's empowerment in the camps. There is counseling and support for women affected by violence, outreach and support for prostituted women and programs for women's basic health care. However these are still in the infant stage and on very small scale. Only a coordinated and consolidated approach can develop and strengthen the programs. At this juncture, support from women's organizations and religious groups in East

Timor interacting with the local groups can strengthen the program. It will also bring about better understanding and solidarity.

6. The majority of the women whom we spoke to in the camps expressed their desire to return to East Timor. Therefore the recent registration exercise conducted by SATGAS in the camps where refugees had to decide either to stay in Indonesia or return to East Timor cannot be seen as an end or final. Both governments in Indonesia and East Timor and UNTAET must recognise the right to return at anytime and the right to stay. It is also important that repatriation is seen as a process. Therefore mechanisms have to be developed so that the process for repatriation is accompanied with increasing women's capacity to make decisions, their access to correct information and availability of resources for the return. Both the women in the camps in West Timor and the community in East Timor need to ensure the safe and secure return of the women.

7. In the repatriation process, where now a large number of the men are ex-militia, it is important to recognize and see the need for admission and accountability to the crimes committed by them. However the process of justice to make them accountable must be transparent in East Timor. The refugees need to understand clearly the mechanisms that have been established to meet their accountability. Efforts therefore need to be initiated before the repatriation to inform, counsel and prepare the refugees for the return.

8. Donor agencies and other supportive organizations should understand the impact of being a women refugee during the last two years in West Timor. This impact is manifested in various ways. Thus efforts need to be made to ensure that humanitarian aid like food reaches the women directly. The distribution of the food, money and other resources from direct assistance can be directly handled by the women themselves. Priority should be given for programs that empower women, that increases her self confidence and capacity to make decisions for herself and the children.

9. In order to ensure that there is sufficient and regular distribution of food and other resources and that they reach the women directly, appropriate UN bodies should assume responsibility for creating an effective, gender sensitive monitoring mechanism. This mechanism should also be transparent.